

VZCZCXRO8420
PP RUEHGI RUEHMA RUEHROV
DE RUEHKH #1261 2250649
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 130649Z AUG 07
FM AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8177
INFO RUCNFUR/DARFUR COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS KHARTOUM 001261

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF A/S FRAZER, AF/SPG
NSC FOR PITTMAN AND SHORTLEY

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AU](#) [EAID](#) [UN](#) [US](#) [SU](#)

SUBJECT: EMBASSY CONTINUES OUTREACH IN THE NORTH

¶1. (SBU) Summary: In an August 9-10 visit to the northern town of Shendi in River Nile State, and also birthplace of Sudanese President Omar Al-Bashir, CDA Fernandez met with the newly-appointed commissioner, presented books to the vice chancellor of Shendi University, and toured area farms and textile factories. CDA used his trip to convey the message that the United States is committed to deepening its understanding of -- and interaction -- with all of Sudan, and that its interests extended beyond the South and Darfur. USAID, POL and RSO also accompanied on the visit. End summary.

SHENDI TRIP BOTH SYMBOLIC, SUBSTANTIVE

¶2. (SBU) Meeting with the new commissioner of Shendi, Jaafar Benaga El-Tayib, CDA told him that the US recognized the need to have a complete picture of Sudan, a picture too often dominated by its interests in the South and in Darfur. The commissioner encouraged this approach and welcomed CDA's visit to Shendi, describing the town as a microcosm of Sudanese society and politics. "It's a model for the country," he said, citing its mixed religious population and lack of security concerns (it is also the home town of President Al-Bashir and much of the NCP elite). CDA used the meeting as an opportunity to advocate the smooth implementation of UNSCR 1769 and to explain the considerable interest the American people took in the issue of Darfur. CDA likened it to the Sudanese people's concern for Palestinians; both issues carried symbolic heft in the respective public opinions, even though they took place outside national boundaries. (Note: At dinner later in the evening, the commissioner again welcomed CDA's visit, praising it as a step in the right direction for improved mutual understanding and a true indicator of US interest in the whole of Sudan. End note.)

¶3. (SBU) In a subsequent visit to Shendi University, CDA presented Vice Chancellor Dr. Abdel Gafar Ali Adam with a set of books for the university's admittedly paltry library (although Shendi University's infrastructure is far better than that found in most other rural universities, especially in the South). Touring the university, CDA took the opportunity to discuss future scholarship and training possibilities. CDA also visited a textiles factory and two area farms, where intensive mango, citrus and banana cultivation was underway.

JUST LIKE ONE OF US, ACCORDING TO LOCAL PRESS

¶4. (SBU) CDA's trip was the first visit to Shendi by an American official in recent memory (likely the first by any foreign representative). The commissioner, university officials and area farmers were overwhelmingly enthusiastic about the visit, and stressed the importance of continued outreach to other areas of the country. The press was also not immune to the perceived unorthodoxy

of this type of "highway diplomacy;" on August 12, Arabic daily Akhbar al-Yawm, referring to CDA's recent visit to the NCP Shura Council as well as his Shendi trip, ran the following headline: "The American Charge d'Affaires Enters the National Congress, Visits Shendi and Stays at the Kawther Hotel!" The columnist went on to note with amazement that the CDA visited Shendi without a security detail, did not request special accommodations (preferring to overnight in one of Shendi's "three-star" hotels), and thought nothing of making the two-hour trip to Shendi by car.

FERNANDEZ